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OVERCROWDED LONDON,

BY

R. M. BEACHCROFT.

Ald., L.C.C.



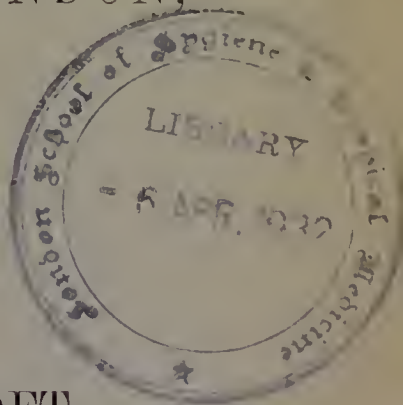
*A Lecture given in Bermondsey Town Hall on 23rd
November, 1893, for the London Reform Union.*

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The subject which I have chosen for this paper is one which can scarcely fail to interest every thinking resident in this vast Babylon.

Important and pressing as are those two other London questions, viz., the method of providing funds for improvements and the incidence of taxation, it cannot, I think, be denied that the congestion of the present crowded centres offers a theme of more vital, if not of paramount importance.

Mr. Charles Harrison once aptly described London as a whole kingdom in itself; it is so; already one-seventh of the entire population of England, or the equivalent of the entire population of Ireland, is housed within the London over which the London County Council presides, occupying, according to the most moderate computation, 557,000 houses. The population of greater London (*i.e.* London within the limits of the police area, covering 701 square miles) will in the next 40 years, according to the report of the Royal Commission on the Water Supply, amount to $8\frac{1}{2}$ millions, or if the estimate of some of my colleagues on the Council is correct, to 13 millions; so that the number of houses, on whose sanitary condition will depend the health of this vast multitude, will by that time certainly exceed a million. Not only then is it a matter of supreme importance to the London of to-day that collections of insanitary areas, constituting as they do a perpetual source of danger to the health of the community, should, as speedily as possible, be removed from our midst, but that the fullest provision should be made to prevent their recurrence.

I propose in the first place to deal with

INSANITARY AREAS,

Their origin and the need which exists for immediate steps to prevent their repetition and further waste of public money.

The term "insanitary area" has become so common a one as scarcely to need definition, but as there may be some who

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need instructing, let me quote the definition given by the Royal Commissioners in their report on the Housing of the Working Classes of 1885, viz., “an area” where the “houses “are so structurally defective as to be incapable of repairs, and “so ill placed with reference to each other as to require, to “bring them up to a proper sanitary standard, nothing short “of demolition and reconstruction.” In 1875 power was first given to the local authorities (in London the Commissioners of Sewers and the late Board of Works) to deal with such areas by way of scheme at the cost of the community. The result was an expenditure on the part of the City of some £300,000, whilst the Board of Works, between 1876 and 1888, undertook some twenty schemes at a cost to the ratepayers of one and a half millions, involving the displacement of 25,000 persons of the working class, the largest area being that in Whitecross-street, St. Luke, while in the parish of Whitechapel no less than three large areas were dealt with. The County Council upon its appointment recognized that the working of the Act of 1875 was financially impossible and at once busied itself in considering how best clearances could be effected both in reference to cost and rehousing. Notwithstanding an almost feverish desire to be up and doing, it contented itself with assisting in the consolidation and amendment of the existing Acts, and beyond the necessary work in connection with two small schemes, inherited from the Metropolitan Board of Works, the Council’s first year and a half was in fact mainly occupied with this legislative reform; the most important amendments secured were improved compensation provisions and the power to initiate and undertake schemes for small areas on the principle of contribution out of local rates. The new Act having passed, and an area in Bethnal-green having been represented as greatly needing a scheme, the Council, in November, 1890, resolved to undertake its clearance on a comprehensive scale.

The scheme was a large one, and, as I for one thought at the time, a dangerously large one, but the object of the

Council was to test to the full the efficacy of the new compensation provisions, and to obtain the utmost possible experience.

To acquire 714 houses, all of which were occupied either wholly or partly by persons of the labouring class; to clear 15 acres of buildings, remodel the district, and at the same time displace and rehouse over 5,000 persons (the actual number displaced is 5,700, and the Council is under obligation to rehouse 4,700), was a gigantic task to undertake.

Two questions are now being properly asked, viz., has the result thus far been satisfactory, and is the likelihood of ultimate success such as to justify similar outlay of the rate-payers' money in the future.

The estimated net cost of the scheme was £300,000 and the actual net cost has now been approximately ascertained to be about £280,000. A large reduction, however, had to be made in the estimate of recoupment. But for this the net gain over the estimate of cost would be about £57,000.

The reduction in the recoupment is due to the difficulty in disposing of land for artizan dwellings, such as the Council requires, a difficulty which has of late greatly increased. It was a great problem with the Board of Works. The number of those who desire to build artizans' houses is necessarily limited, and generally those who build prefer selecting their own sites to taking less suitable land from the Council. The recent increase of this difficulty is no doubt due mainly to the conditions attached, and properly attached, by the Council, in the direction of securing more light and air, and consequently reducing the area of land available for buildings.

The Council is already itself building on part of the Boundary-street site. If it undertakes the whole building operation it must be on the footing of a net return of 3 per cent. on the cost of building and of the value of the land after providing for a sinking fund of some kind.

We will assume that the Council debits the value of the

cleared land to their building account. Then the net cost of the clearance will remain £280,000, or £60 a head of the 4,700 persons displaced who are to be rehoused, or taking the average of four to a family, about £240 per family, a figure which, if the matter of clearances is regarded from the point of view of the number of persons who can be rehoused, offers sufficient food for reflection, and one which shows no apparent improvement on the schemes of the Board of Works. The comparison, however, is not a fair one, because the Council's regulations necessitate a far fewer number being accommodated on the cleared areas, whereas the sites cleared by the Board of Works, and disposed of by them, gave accommodation, with few exceptions, to many more persons than were actually displaced. If the Board of Works, for example, had dealt with the Bethnal-green area and sold it, without the Council's restrictions, there is no doubt that the new buildings would have accommodated considerably more than the 5,700 persons displaced, and the cost per head would have shown a proportionate reduction. The following table gives in detail the net cost, number of persons displaced, number for whom new buildings were or are to be erected, and cost per head of such number, in regard to all the clearance schemes effected since 1875—

Table showing results of Clearance Schemes under Housing of the Working Classes Acts from 1876 to 1886—

| Date of Act sanctioning scheme. | Name. | Number of the working classes displaced. | Net cost to 31st December, 1892. | Number of persons re-housed or to be re-housed. | Net cost per head. |
|---------------------------------|---|--|----------------------------------|---|--------------------|
| 1876 | Whitechapel and Limehouse ... | 3,669 | £ 151,524 | 3,684 | Over 41 |
| „ | Clerkenwell (Pear Tree-court) ... | 410 | 20,769 | 612 | „ 33 |
| 1877 | Whitechapel (Goulston - street, and Flower and Dean-street). | 3,247 | 284,222 | 3,702 | „ 76 |
| „ | St. George - the - Martyr, South-wark. | 1,266 | 49,323 | 1,906 | „ 25 |
| „ | St. Martin - in - the - Fields and Strand District (Bedfordbury). | 797 | 75,511 | 720 | „ 104 |
| „ | St. Giles-in-the-Fields (No. 1. Great Wild-street). | 1,598 | 105,643 | 1,620 | „ 56 |
| „ | St. Luke (Whitecross-street) | 3,687 | 314,452 | 3,740 | „ 84 |
| | Carried forward ... | 11,674 | 1,001,441 | 15,984 | |

| Date of Act sanctioning scheme. | Name. | Number of the working classes displaced. | Net cost to 31st December, 1892. | Number of persons re-housed or to be re-housed | Net cost per head. |
|---------------------------------|--|--|----------------------------------|--|--------------------|
| | Brought forward | 14,674 | £ 1,001,444 | 15,984 | £ |
| 1877 | Islington (No. 1, High-street) .. | 515 | 38,187 | 800 | Over 47 |
| " | Westminster (Old Pyc-street) .. | 874 | 49,896 | 1,700 | " 29 |
| 1878 | St. Marylebone (Bowman's-buildings). | 816 | 36,458 | 1,288 | " 28 |
| " | Islington (Essex-road) | 1,796 | 97,899 | 3,866 | " 25 |
| 1879 | Poplar (Wells-street) | 1,029 | 64,115 | 1,392 | " 46 |
| 1883 | St. George-in-the-East (Tench-street). | 1,284 | 51,981 | a — | — |
| " | Limchouse (Brook-street) .. | 562 | 18,350 | b 281 | " 65 |
| " | Greenwich (Trafalgar-road) | 378 | 17,913 | b 192 | " 93 |
| 1885 | " (Hughes-fields) | 1,786 | 80,545 | b 893 | " 90 |
| " | Lambeth (Windmill-row) ... | 459 | 9,779 | 460 | " 21 |
| " | Newington (Tabard-street) | 220 | 8,229 | 288 | " 28 |
| 1886 | Limchouse (Cable-street)... | 970 | 39,347 | b 485 | " 81 |
| " | St. Giles (Shelton-street)... | 1,208 | 65,980 | b 608 | " 108 |
| | Totals | 25,892 | 1,580,123 | 27,489 | |

a The land cleared in this scheme used as a recreation-ground.

b These schemes devolved on the Council to carry out. The buildings are now only partly erected, and in two cases (Trafalgar-road and Cable-street) not yet begun.

N.B.—From this table it will be seen that the cost per head of schemes other than (a) and (b) exceeds £50, and of those which devolved on the Council to execute, £90.

The difference resulting from the action of the Council will be observed; the insistence upon proper air space for the buildings to be erected has delayed the re-building for seven or eight and in one case ten years, until at last in most instances after repeated futile auctions the Council has been obliged to undertake the work itself, and the cost per head of persons re-housed has been nearly doubled.

Unsatisfactory as is the conclusion to be drawn from the above table, it must be conceded that the effect of the new compensation clauses of the Act of 1890 has been salutary, and that at all events the freeholders of the property within the Bethnal-green area have made no profit out of selling to the Council.

Some details on this head may be of interest. There were 183 claims in all, of which 69 were those of different sets of freeholders, whilst the rest came from leaseholders and traders. The total claims amounted to £457,633, of which £162,199 represent leasehold and trade interests, and £295,434 the freehold. The settlement was effected for

£266,532, a difference of £191,101, which must be attributed in part at all events to the more drastic compensation provisions. The settlement of all these claims has taken two years, and it is hardly matter for surprise that those two years should have been distressful ones, not only for those occupying the area, but for the whole neighbourhood; for, when it was known that the Council were to purchase, very little was spent in repairs by the owners. As houses were purchased by the Council they were (unless capable of being made temporarily habitable) closed and boarded up, and accommodation found for the occupants in the neighbourhood. The principle on which the Council hoped to proceed was that of sectional treatment, clearing one section first, then building on it, so as to accommodate those on the next section, and so on; on paper nothing could be better, but in fact nothing could be more difficult to accomplish, and so it has proved.

Up to Michaelmas last, 646 houses out of the 714 came into possession of the Council, of which 126 were vacant and 349 had to be closed forthwith by the Council, thus about 3,200 persons have already been displaced, or more than half the original population. All that could be done has been done. Vacant accommodation has been found within a quarter of a mile for 1,700, and for 970 within half a mile, the rest having found homes further afield, and compensation for removal has been paid in all cases where the substituted accommodation has been satisfactory. Unless the Council was provided with buildings of its own to offer the tenants it could have done no more, but it must be recognized as the most unsatisfactory feature of wholesale clearances such as these, that it is not those who are thus "temporarily" accommodated elsewhere who ultimately come back to the new buildings on the site, and further that the filling up of vacant accommodation in a crowded district inevitably limits the means of providing for the natural movement of the population of that district, and must therefore in the result tend to overcrowding. I fear it is more than likely that the

majority of the remaining 2,500 persons on the area will have disappeared before the new buildings are ready for them.

The answer then to the two questions suggested above cannot in my opinion be a satisfactory one. All that can be said on the one hand is that the Council has done its best and spared no pains, and on the other, that the Council is not likely willingly to undertake another large scheme of the kind.

Had it been possible to condemn the whole area without purchase, and, while insisting that every house should be permanently closed, to provide cottage homes in a suburb for all the occupants, it would have been cheaper for the ratepayers to have given the cottages rent free, and even to have supplied free travel to and from London for the bread-winners, than to carry out the present scheme.

Numerous small clearance schemes have been initiated or promoted by the Council since the Act of 1890, and are now in course of being carried out, *vide licet* in Holborn, Islington, Deptford, Limehouse, St. George's-in-the-East, Poplar, Southwark, and Shoreditch, the total cost of which may be roughly estimated at £150,000, of which about half will be borne by the Council and half by the districts. These smaller schemes are free from many of the difficulties attendant on the larger ones, but the fact remains that their cost has to be borne by the rates, and that in no case is it possible to provide proper dwelling accommodation on the spot cleared for anything like the number of those displaced. One of the objects originally aimed at by the Council, in asking for the power to deal with these smaller areas, was the greater facility it would afford for creating small breathing spaces. In one or two cases this object has been attained, and operations in this direction may with advantage be extended.

I have expressed the opinion that the Council will not voluntarily repeat the Bethnal-green scheme; it must be borne in mind, however, that with the law as it stands the Council may find itself obliged to undertake large schemes,

whether it wishes to do so or not, for any district medical officer may (and if the case is a bad one it is his duty to do so) proscribe an area as unhealthy, and if the Council should fail to proceed the Home Secretary may make it incumbent upon the Council to do so.

The instance of Somers-town is in point. Here the desire of St. Pancras being to get all their slums cleared out at the expense of the Consolidated Fund led to the Council being moved to undertake the clearance of practically the whole of Somers-town as well as other areas, which would have involved a cost of at least a quarter of a million ; the Council was not prepared to proceed by way of metropolitan scheme, and a Home Secretary's inquiry, while relieving the Council of this heavy burden, resulted in a very considerable scheme for part of Somers-town being put upon the Council, involving an outlay of £65,000. If the scheme is carried out, 1,266 persons will be displaced, and the site will only accommodate 650, so that the re-housing of these 650 would cost the ratepayers £100 a head. Impressed by the gravity of the situation, the Council on the 1st of this month resolved to postpone for the present any action. This resolution renders it absolutely necessary that the whole subject should receive the most thorough investigation.

The origin of insanitary areas.

What, it will be asked, are the causes which have led to the existence of these insanitary areas ? Overcrowding of course is the main cause, not mere overcrowding of persons, but overcrowding of buildings on land. The population of London spread equally over its whole area, shows but 54 persons to the acre, comparing favourably with many cities such as Liverpool, where the proportion is 116 ; but then it must be remembered that the parks and open spaces of London devoted to the use of the public, account for 7,000 acres, not to speak of squares and private gardens.

The congested quarters of London on the other hand present a very different aspect. If we take the district within

the cab radius we find the proportion is 88 persons to the acre, and in several parishes the number is as high as 200 to the acre for the whole parish, for example, St. George's, Southwark, 210, and Whitechapel and Holborn, each 200 ; and the almost daily increase going on among the outlying parishes, suggests that this overcrowding on space is increasing at a rate all too fearful, and this can scarcely fail to be so as block after block of artisans' dwellings takes the place of single storied houses. The Council is about to acquire ten acres of the Millbank prison site, in order to erect buildings for 3,700 persons. This means 370 to the acre after allowing for adequate air spaces, which is about half the number which Sir Sydney Waterlow's Company reckon upon in their buildings. If speculative builders were to take the same site they would under the existing law be able to crowd four times that amount of building on the site and show a density of 1,500 to the acre, by no means an uncommon thing to find in London. In solitary cases the effect of such a density on the health of the community might not be serious, but if it became at all general the result could hardly fail to be disastrous.

London building laws.

London has been built without due safeguard against the prevailing ignorance as to the necessity of air space, and in the absence of proper restrictions on the greed and avarice of landowners and building lessees. As leases have fallen in gardens and open yards have been utilized for building, at the sweet will of individual owners, without any regard to the effect upon adjacent buildings. The preservation of light and air has indeed for centuries in London been the privilege merely of those able to afford to fight their neighbours in the law courts, and that too with speculative result.

The following extract from the evidence given in February last, at the official enquiry held regarding the Somers-town area, is illustrative of what has happened and is happening all over London, and accounts for the call made on the ratepayers to remedy evils occasioned simply by the want of proper building regulations.

The evidence is that of Dr. Sykes, the medical officer of health for the district—

“ Q. Now, this area originally, Dr. Sykes, many years ago apparently, consisted largely of small houses with long gardens, did it not ?

“ A. Yes, that is so.

“ Q. Cottages ?

“ A. Yes, many years ago.

“ Q. Small houses with large gardens ?

“ A. Yes.

“ Q. And the map itself shows that there was no definite plan of streets applied to the area ?

“ A. No, they were built regardless of position or situation, and approximating to one another without any restriction as to light and air, or any other sanitary convenience.

“ Q. As the district became more thickly populated, and time came nearer to the present day, what has happened in regard to these long gardens ?

“ A. Many of them have been built over as workshops and stables, and at the present moment, yearly these workshops and stables are increasing in number, so that ultimately there is no doubt the whole of these gardens in that area will be covered with buildings.

“ Q. What effect has that on the sanitary character of the area as a whole ?

“ A. Well, it blocks out the proper light and air, and crowds the space unduly with buildings.

“ Q. So that from that cause alone the area is becoming more insanitary ?

“ A. Yes, from year to year.

“ Q. In regard to the new buildings that are being erected in the area, are they of the same height as the old ones ?

“ A. The new buildings that are being erected are three or four times the height of the old ones, which were generally single, or two-storey cottages. Now they

“ are being erected three or four and five storeys high
 “ --well, five storeys high in several instances, and in
 “ the narrowest part of the area.

“ Q. That is of course without any relation to the width
 “ of the streets at all ?

“ A. Without any relation to the width of the streets.”

Just as it is impossible now to discuss in any assembly holding advanced views the question of “ Home Rule ” or “ betterment ” without raising the cry of “ Down with the House of Lords,” so it is almost the inevitable cry of “ Down with the ground landlords ” when the subject I am dealing with is brought up ; but is the blame to be laid mainly at the door of the ground landlords and building lessees of London ? Does not the blame, after all, rest with those who are responsible for the absence of proper regulations controlling building in London ?

Most people would imagine that owners and builders were subjected to restrictions, which would at all events secure something adequate in the way of free circulation of air, but it is not so.

Avoiding as far as possible technical language, I will endeavour to explain how this matter really stands, and then draw conclusions.

Up to 1844 there was no law whatever to secure any open space in the rear of buildings in London, or in any way to limit their height by the width of adjoining streets ; and it was not until 1855 that any specific provision was made. An act of that year provided that a house must have an open space in the rear or side belonging to it of at least 100 square feet, a provision which could have little or no effect in preventing back-to-back houses. In 1882 the amount of this space was extended in regard to buildings subsequently erected, it being required that such space should be measured by the extent of frontage. Up to 1855 there was nothing to prevent narrow streets being constructed. In that year the Board of Works was authorised to make by-laws regulating new streets, and by-laws were made in 1857 prescribing a minimum width of 40 feet for all *new streets*. In the same way, up to 1862, no

law existed dealing with the height of buildings. In that year an Act prescribed that buildings in *new streets* should not exceed 50 feet, unless the street was of a greater width than 50 feet, recognition being thus for the first time given to the principle that the open space required should be in proportion to height of buildings, and in their Act of 1890 the County Council obtained a clause prohibiting any building, except a church, exceeding 90 feet in height. The most important enactment, however, bearing on the subject is that of 1878, which provided that, except with the consent of the local authority, all houses built after that date should be set back at least 20 feet from the centre of the roadway, with a proviso exempting sites then occupied by buildings.

If this Act of 1878 had been in force before London had been built up, its value would have been incalculable; as it is, however, its beneficial effects can only be felt in neighbourhoods where maiden building land or land not built upon in 1878 still exists. In fact, legislation has gone out of the way to secure to all owners of old buildings in old streets the right to perpetuate and repeat insanitary conditions.

According to evidence given before the Town Holdings Committee there existed 329,000 houses in London in 1851 : the owners of these houses escape all restrictions when rebuilding, except that they must not build higher than 90 feet.

Between the years 1851 and 1878 some 285,000 new houses were added ; the owners of these, unless built on new streets, escape the legal obligation of setting back 20 feet from the centre of the road.

I contend, and have for some time contended, that the time has now come when Parliament should be asked to extend the principle which underlies all the Acts to which reference has been made, viz., that of safe-guarding the health of the people, in such a manner as to prevent the erection of *any* dwelling-houses, whether *on old* or new sites, unless adequate provision is made for air spaces both front and back, and that in proportion to the height of the house.

The model by-laws adopted by the Local Government

Board for guidance of town authorities outside London prescribe a minimum of 24 feet in front, and a depth varying from 10 to 25 feet at the rear according to height of building. If these by-laws are necessary outside London, much more are they necessary inside, and the fact that houses were built prior to 1878, abutting on a ten foot or a five foot alley is surely no justification for allowing their owners to rebuild on the same lines and to any height up to 90 feet.

Law in the provinces.

Outside London, all urban authorities have power under the Public Health Act, 1875, to frame by-laws generally with respect to the sufficiency of space about new buildings, and that Act which, be it remembered, excludes London from its operation, specially includes in the term "new buildings" all buildings pulled down to the ground floor.

Inquiries made show that nearly all the important towns have by-laws or regulations on the subject, the chief exceptions being Cheltenham, Kidderminster, Devonport, Jarrow, Chertsey, and Bacup.

In the case of 32 of the large towns and districts with populations exceeding 10,000, including Bristol, Blackpool, Manchester, and Newport, as well as the Districts of Hornsey, Tottenham, West Ham, Willesden, and Enfield-town, the model by-laws are in force, and applicable to all buildings except public ones and warehouses; in 26 other similar towns, including Birmingham, Carlisle, Cambridge, Exeter, Huddersfield, Plymouth, Southport, Wolverhampton and Sheffield similar provision is made either by way of model by-laws or local acts, power being however given to the local authorities to modify the requirements, where their enforcement involves too much sacrifice of property. In the case of sixteen other towns, including Brighton, Birkenhead, Stockport, York, and Liverpool, the model by-laws have been adopted, but a larger extent of open space insisted upon than these require.

Application of the principle to London.

The opponents of the application of this principle to London, contend that compensation should be paid for any loss

sustained by individual owners; they fail, however, to appreciate the difference between a setting back of buildings for the purpose of traffic and street widening, which involves the taking of land, and the setting back required to meet the necessities of health where the taking of land is unnecessary. No compensation is paid in the provinces unless the land left vacant is actually required for the street, and none should be paid in London. The land left vacant would remain a forecourt of the building set back, and remain so unless and until required by the authorities for the widening of the street, when payment would have to be made in the usual way as for a street improvement.

There is no more ground for compensation for setting back than there was when, in 1855, Parliament made it incumbent on owners of land in London fronting on new streets, to limit the height of their houses by the width of the street; or when, in 1862, owners of land were prohibited from building beyond the general line of buildings in any street; or again when, in 1890, owners of land in London were prohibited from extending any building within twenty feet of the centre of a roadway—the principle is the same. The process would operate slowly but gradually, and would result in the ultimate disappearance of narrow streets and courts, and that without any of the sudden dislocation of business or displacement of occupiers caused by clearance and improvement schemes. It should of course be made prohibitory on any person to raise any existing building so as to infringe the new provision proposed, and special provision must be made to meet the case of blocks of artisans' buildings so as to ensure a due amount of intervening space between each block.

It is too much to expect that buildings in all our old streets, especially those mainly used for business purposes, shall be set back twenty feet from the centre of the road; a discretion must naturally be left in the hands of the central authority, as is done in many provincial towns, to allow exceptions and modifications where occasion demands. That unavoidable cases of hardship would, however, arise especially among

small owners is inevitable, but it must be remembered that the new law would not operate till a building was worn out or condemned, and when its value is therefore reduced to one of site only. In cases where a setting back so restricted the building area as practically to prevent any building upon it, it would be but fair that the owner should be given the right to call upon the local authority to purchase the whole of his land as vacant land, a corresponding option to purchase being given to the authority, and there seems no insuperable reason against such an arrangement. The further objection that the plan proposed would involve numberless irregular forecourts all over London will doubtless be raised, but apart from temporary unsightliness any real inconveniences can be guarded against by proper local regulations. The lines of forecourt, moreover, would not be *more* irregular than are the lines of buildings now, while every additional setting back would help towards the uniformity of building frontage. Again it may be urged as unjust that a recent building in an old narrow court should have the benefit of the setting back of an old building opposite without some contribution being enforced. This may be one of those cases where the betterment principle would be properly applicable.

A more serious objection is that owners, with the fear of having such drastic provisions enforced against them will be less disposed to rebuild, and indeed may be tempted to keep old property so far patched up as to escape condemnation, that there would be such an incentive is undeniable, but the experience of large towns does not go to prove this to have operated to any serious extent, and the reason for this is probably to be found in the tendency of land in towns to increase in value; an increase of which the owner cannot usually take advantage unless rebuilding takes place. It undoubtedly means, however, that the local authorities *would* have to exercise increased vigilance over the sanitary condition of old houses in their districts, and this leads to the last point for consideration on this branch of the subject, viz.—

*The effect which such an alteration of the law would
have on insanitary areas.*

Doubtless the mere insistence on setting back in narrow streets and courts, and giving due air space in rear of new buildings, will not suffice, unless something is done to apply the suggested new law directly to the case of insanitary areas, and to houses whose condition is such as reasonably to render them beyond repair. The owners of houses in old congested districts, and especially small cottages which abound in the East-end of London, ought to be bound to pull them down when worn out. The existing law is wholly insufficient in this respect. Closing orders are well in their way, but to be effectual they should be accompanied by absolute demolition orders where the local authority is satisfied that the building is past repair. At present the stipendiary magistrates are the judges as to whether closing orders should be made, and, when made, the middle-man is left to make the closed house habitable if he can, which generally means a coat of paint and a daub of whitewash. It is only in the event of his practically doing nothing that the authority can step in and demolish, and then there is an appeal to quarter sessions. This has proved a most unsatisfactory arrangement. Magistrates take different views as to when a house is ripe for closing, with results unfair alike to the public and owners. I suggest that a special tribunal, somewhat on the lines of the one established under the Act of last session, restricting building on low-lying land, should be substituted; that the Council, as well as the vestries, should have the power of making both closing and demolition orders, with a simple right of appeal to such special tribunal, which should be given the right to decide, without further appeal, the question, not only whether a house, owing to condition or situation, is unfit for habitation, but whether it is or is not capable of being made so without re-construction.

The Council should in future, when areas are proved to be insanitary, be possessed, not only of the power it now has of proceeding by way of clearance scheme, but also by way of

closing order, and demolition, leaving owners to rebuild subject to the proposed new restrictive provisions as to setting back, and provision of air space in rear.

There is no sound reason why an owner should be awarded compensation on the basis of the whole area occupied by building being paid for as building site when sanitation requires that one-third of it should be left open and unbuilt upon. Take for example an area in Snow's-fields, Bermondsey, now under consideration; here we have a winding street 20 feet wide, with numerous alleys and courts, mostly culs-de-sac, running out of it, varying from $11\frac{1}{2}$ feet to 20 feet in width; or again, such a court as Maypole-alley, leading out of Borough High-street, part of which to the extent of over 40 yards is but 5 feet in width, with two or three storey dwellings on each side. The owners of the houses in these streets and courts ought not, if the area is condemned, to be paid on the assumption that they can rebuild under similar conditions, and yet that is what it amounts to at present.

It will, I think, be appreciated that if such an alteration in the law as has been sketched out takes place, that which is desired would be accomplished; new insanitary areas would no longer arise, and old ones could be dealt with on terms not unfair to the ratepayer. Simple remedies when available are preferable to drastic alterations of the entire economic system, and just as I believe the cry for taxation of ground values may ultimately be met by some simple form of municipal death duty, so do I think that the desire to make ground landlords contribute directly towards London's improvement in the direction aimed at can be satisfied by what is here proposed. The proposal involves, admittedly, a large sacrifice on the part of owners, larger, it may be, than is represented by any direct tax yet proposed. That it will, moreover, affect small as well as large owners, and leaseholders as well as freeholders, goes without saying, and opposition from many quarters may, in consequence, be anticipated. When, however, the fundamental principle is once acknowledged, the need for its application will,

I am confident, be conceded. This fundamental principle is that the ownership of land should carry with it the obligation to exercise it only in a manner which will not be detrimental to the health either of the immediate occupiers or of the community at large.

I have left myself but little space to deal with that other branch of the "overcrowding" question, viz.—

As to the displacement from overcrowded centres.

As will be gathered from what has been said, clearance schemes under the present system necessitate entire expropriation of quite half the population of the area dealt with. Strict enforcement of the present laws against overcrowding would probably necessitate a similar amount of removal from other congested centres.

We have passed through the experimental stage now, and know that except in isolated instances where vacant land happens to be available in the neighbourhood on which anticipatory buildings may be erected, the large majority of the persons dislodged by clearances have to shift for themselves, rarely, if ever, to return to the old site. We know also that these persons help to add to the unsanitary condition of other areas by their very removal ; so much so that the records of the late Board show that the same people have often been made to shift two or three times by succeeding clearances.

"Housing of the Working Classes Act, you call it"! said a critical working man to me once at a public meeting in the East-end. "*Unhousing* I call it."

The question which seems to press most immediately for an answer is whether municipal or state aid, is to be invoked to house displaced workers, and if so, to what extent ; or whether we are to continue to rely on the natural laws of supply and demand, trusting, that is, to the operations of the various dwellings companies and of philanthropic or commercial associations to all of whom London is already so greatly indebted ?

I venture to think there are few reformers so advanced as to advocate wholesale building schemes out of the public exchequer,

and even if the majority held that view, the difficulty would still remain as to what the building scheme should be.

Few again who would favour the provision out of the rates of dwellings for the working class population upon other than a commercial or remunerative basis; the working man has never expressed any particular wish to become the subject of public charity, and it is to be hoped never will be led to expect it, as Miss Octavia Hill seems to fear he may, at the hands of the Council.

It may help matters if we separate the question into two parts, which I will call the particular, and the general.

As to the particular part, by which I mean the displacement caused in the particular case of clearances and street improvements, there can be little doubt but that it is the duty of the municipality not only to find sites on which to build for those who require to live on or near the spot cleared or improved, but also in certain events to build itself; those events arise when either no offer comes from outside to build on suitable terms or when the needful advantages to be secured are such as private enterprise may be found unable or unwilling to concede.

It does not, however, necessarily follow that all London workers displaced require to be re-housed in costly buildings in the centre, it may be, of some valuable commercial district.

The displaced may be classed in three divisions; (1) those who are actually dependent for their livelihood upon occupations in the locality, involving exceptional hours of labour or attendance, such as employees in the markets; (2) those whose work lies within a mile, and to whom residence within a mile of such work is essential; (3) those whose occupations, while not of such a character, yet demand due consideration.

Provision should in all cases be made for those in the first and second categories, and that prior to actual displacement, whilst for those in the third class the provision should be in a suburb.

This was the plan proposed in the case of the Holborn to Strand street scheme now unfortunately postponed; it was ascertained that out of a total of 2,600 persons who would be

displaced, 1,500 would be persons dependent on employment within a mile radius, and that of that number 270 would come within the first category above mentioned. It was decided that these 270 must be housed on the spot, and that to do this neighbouring business premises must be specially acquired in order to erect dwellings upon the site so cleared. Needless to say the cost of this would have been very heavy. Of the remaining persons it was found that 500 came within No. 2 category, and would need to be actually housed within about a mile, and that the case of the remaining 700 or 800 would be met by accommodation in a suburb, which it was agreed should be offered with travelling facilities or the equivalent, for it must always be remembered that housing at a distance from the daily calling, even where practicable in regard to hours of work, means not only cost of travel but loss of time.

Differentiation of the kind indicated above seems possible in most if not all cases, and whilst this does not in any sense dispose of the difficulty, it certainly should help to minimise it. Referring to the example quoted, the Council would practically have undertaken the re-housing in one way or another of 1,500 out of 2,600 persons, and the remaining 1,100 would presumably have been persons in a position to take care of themselves.

There are of course districts in London—such as Shore-ditch—where the artizan population is so large that a summary displacement affects nearly all alike, and it is imperative that all should live near their respective centres of work. The impossible cannot be achieved, and some kind of selection must even then be resorted to. Our builders and architects have, it is true, much to learn in this matter—they certainly have not yet hit upon the best or cheapest method of providing accommodation for the toilers where space is so valuable, and it is to be hoped that some plan may yet be devised which combines the principle of the block dwelling with that of the lodging house, giving to families the advantage of a common kitchen, and so increase healthy means of accommodation.

To meet the provision which as pointed out must, in any case, be made for large numbers in the suburbs, even of those displaced by clearances and street improvements, effected through the action of the Council, the Council as it seems to me is not only justified but bound to act in anticipation of the exigencies of the case, and to secure land in various convenient parts of the suburbs, and if it can find companies or builders ready to build to order, then to let for that purpose; but it must be remembered that the one obligation on the Council is to offer the accommodation to particular persons, and few companies or builders would agree to this, so that the Council may, and probably will in many cases, find itself forced to build.

It is of little use building attractive cottage homes in the suburbs if these merely serve to draw more people from the rural districts, and, utopian though it may appear to some, I think it is within the practical sphere of the Council's action to limit the occupation of suburban cottages, built for special persons, to those special persons, or to persons in a similar category expropriated from their homes. It may be asked on what principle is the Council bound to provide re-housing for the poor who are displaced. The answer is that the standing orders of both Houses of Parliament prescribe it, and that if tradesmen and publicans are compensated for their disturbance, equally should the workers who have established homes or occupations be ensured substituted accommodation at no greater cost to themselves.

So much for particular displacements.

As to the general displacement which is going on, and must increase as years advance, and as overcrowding, both of space and dwellings diminishes, this can only be met by increased inducements being offered to the poorer wage-earning class to move into the suburbs accompanied by far greater facilities for travelling to and fro than at present exists. Not only must the workers be induced to move outwards, but factories and workshops must be led to follow suit.

The Council can assist in several ways. It can give every

encouragement possible to building in the suburbs. If one Company (the Artizans' Dwellings Company) has found it remunerative to build 5,000 houses in the suburbs, and to give accommodation in these and their block dwellings for 70,000 persons, why not others? As the chairman of that company has said their supply is but a drop to the ocean—though a good drop. The Council can advance money at a low rate of interest to any responsible company for the purpose of acquiring land or building. It can also obtain such further statutory provisions as may be required to ensure that buildings are properly erected, some of which may otherwise be erected in suburbs which are not within the district of any urban authority, and therefore not subject to any by-laws; and the Council can follow up the steps already so successfully initiated in the matter of workmen's trains and additional travelling facilities.

WORKMEN'S TRAINS.

As the Royal Commission for enquiring into the Housing of the Working Classes found in 1885, if the railways are to be utilized for these classes, two conditions must be satisfied: First "the fares must not exceed the difference between the rent of their houses in the overcrowded districts and the lower rents in the suburbs; secondly, the companies must provide carriages at these reduced fares which will bring the people to and from their work at convenient hours."

The action of the Council in the early part of last year in making an exhaustive enquiry into the whole subject of workmen's trains met with general approval. The time had come when it was no longer possible to ignore the fact that a large portion of the population must inevitably be forced to live further afield.

Various recommendations and suggestions were put forward, having for their main object the securing of a uniform system of fares, a zone limit of some kind, and increased facilities in regard to time of departures from and arrival at the termini. These had their fruition in a remarkable conference held at the Board of Trade in June last, whereat all the great metro-

politan railways were represented, and where a partial agreement was come to on various points, and when it was agreed on behalf of the companies to consider seriously as to the adoption of a zone system, or at all events of a grouping of fares for varying distances up to 12 miles from the termini. The matter, however, brooks of no further delay, and the Board of Trade should be pressed to bring matters to a settlement, so that other districts as well as Enfield and the many stations on the Great Eastern system may be opened up for workmen's dwellings. If any one desires an illustration of the effect of cheap train service, let him visit the building estates at Bush-hill-park, Enfield. Nearly the whole of the houses on these estates are occupied by artizans who travel to and fro by the workmen's trains ; and a large number of them, I have evidence for saying, came from the East-end of London, tempted by the lower rents and the travelling facilities. The opening up of the estates mentioned was due to the cheap train service. A similar service on the other great lines, such as the Midland, the Great Western, the South Eastern, and the North Western would undoubtedly have similar results ; that the effect would be also to raise the value of suburban land is undoubted, and if the municipality desires to intercept some of this increment of value, the sooner it intervenes and acquires for its own purposes desirable sites the better.

If the companies can also be induced to provide superior cheap trains, running from 7 to 9 a.m., at half fares, and so meet the wants of that large class of clerks and shop-girls who need consideration now-a-days almost as much as working men, the effect would be not only to increase the dispersion outwards but help to make room for the early workers whose necessities involve residence close at hand.

Notwithstanding that about 20 million workmen's tickets are issued yearly by the Metropolitan railway companies, it has been calculated that only about 6 per cent. of the bread winners among the working classes in London travel by rail. The marked increase of traffic on the tramway lines is satisfactory as showing the greater tendency to travel ; equally

satisfactory is it to find the tram companies recognising what the railway companies have been so slow to acknowledge, viz., that it is the third class traveller who makes the profit, are beginning to further reduce their fares, one company having only recently reduced its fares to a halfpenny.

Parliament has no harder nut to crack than in settling the terms upon which fresh railway communications into and through London are to be provided, but that new railways into the suburbs independent of the present "Metropolitan" system are urgently and immediately called for will be admitted by any one who has had occasion to use the Baker-street or Ludgate-hill stations of an evening. Fresh schemes, it is true, make their appearance each session, but only to be set aside, either for want of evidence of capital, or for lack of courage on the part of the legislature to sanction further burrowings or overhead works. That the investing public has begun to look very askance at ventures involving an expenditure of three-quarters of a million a mile is, however, beyond dispute, and Mr. Acworth is probably correct when he says that new railways on the principle of the Metropolitan and District are now commercially impossible. The question is of more than mere metropolitan importance, and will have to be treated accordingly, or all efforts to house the swelling population in a reasonable and sanitary manner will be unavailing; in other words, if private enterprise cannot be sufficiently encouraged to undertake the work, the State will, however reluctant many of us may feel, have to step in and aid if not actually do it, instead of levying, as it now does, toll on the passenger traffic. Dr. Longstaff, in an able paper read before the Statistical Society a few months back, attributes the alarming depopulation of our rural districts mainly to what he terms *improved communications*. May it not be equally said that the alarming aggregation into the towns can chiefly be counteracted by the greatest possible extension of all means of locomotion?

R. MELVILL BEACHCROFT.

November 23rd, 1893.

